

What is claimed is:

1. A communication method implemented in a communication network for allowing members of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said communication method comprising:

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- a. forming an affinity group containing two or more members;
 - b. storing, in an individual's members communication device, status information concerning other members of said affinity;
 - c. when the status of a one member in said affinity group changes, sending a status update message from said member whose status has changed to the other members of said affinity group;
 - d. receiving said status update messages concerning other members of said affinity group; and
 - e. updating said status information in said individual member's communication device when a status update message concerning another member is received.

2. The communication method according to claim 1 wherein said status information comprises a plurality of status items.

3. The communication method according to claim 2 wherein the status information includes at least one or more of the following status items: on/off status of the member; activity status of the member; and location of the member.

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4. The communication method according to claim 2 wherein each individual member selects the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to other members of the affinity group.

5. The communication method according to claim 2 further including the step of designating a period during which status updates are enabled.

6. The communication method according to claim 2 further including the step of designating a period during which status updates are suppressed.

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7. The communication method according to claim 1 further including the step of automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages when a status change is detected.

8. The communication method according to claim 7 wherein the status of a member is monitored by said member's communication device and wherein said communication device is programmed to automatically transmit a status update message when a change in status is detected.

9. The communication method according to claim 7 wherein the status of a member is monitored by a centralized server in said communication network and wherein status update messages are transmitted to other members in said affinity group when a member's status changes.

10. A communication method implemented in a mobile communication network for allowing members of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said communication method comprising:

- a. forming an affinity group containing two or more members;
- b. storing member status information data in mobile communication devices used by said members;
- c. sending a status update message from a first member's communication device to a centralized server when said first member's status changes;
- d. forwarding said status update message from said server to a second member of said affinity group;
- d. receiving said status update message at said second member's mobile communication device; and

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e. updating said status information in said second member's mobile communication device when said status update message is received.

11. The communication method according to claim 10 wherein said status information comprises a plurality of status items.

12. The communication method according to claim 11 wherein the status information includes at least one or more of the following status items: on/off status of the member; activity status of the member; and location of the member.

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13. The communication method according to claim 11 wherein each individual member selects the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to other members of the affinity group.

14. The communication method according to claim 11 further including the step of designating a period during which status updates are enabled.

15. The communication method according to claim 11 further including the step of designating a period during which status updates are suppressed.

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16. The communication method according to claim 10 further including the step of automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages when a status change is detected.

17. The communication method according to claim 16 wherein the status of a member is monitored by said member's communication device and wherein said communication device is programmed to automatically transmit a status update message when a change in status is detected.

18. The communication method according to claim 16 wherein the status of a member is monitored by a centralized server in said communication network and

wherein status update messages are transmitted to other members in said affinity group when a member's status changes.

19. A mobile communication device for allowing a member of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said mobile communication device comprising:

a. a memory for storing member status information data;

b. a transmitter responsive for transmitting status update messages to other members of said affinity group when said member's status changes;

c. a receiver for receiving status update messages from other members of said affinity group;

d. a processor operatively connected to said memory for writing status information to and reading status information from said memory, said processor being programmed to:

1. generate a status update message when said member's status changes for transmission by said transmitter to other members of said affinity group; and
2. update said status information stored in said memory when a status update message is received from another member of said affinity group.

20. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 wherein the member status information stored in said memory includes a plurality of status items.

21. The mobile communication device according to claim 20 wherein the status items include one or more of the following status items: on/off status of the member; activity status of the member; and location of the member.

22. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for selecting the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to other members of the affinity group.

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23. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further means for designating a period during which status updates are enabled.

24. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for designating a period during which status updates are suppressed.

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25. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages when a status change is detected.